



The Soul Machine



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Chapter 1 by Mike Zou

A huge tear drop slid from the corner of his left eye, down to his hollow cheek. This dead man's pupils have dilated long ago, but some organs were still functioning. Like magic.

The wind howled outside the window, as if it's attempting to destroy everything in the exotic house. Even god agreed, as it seemed, that this insidious place must be completely razed down to prevent something much more horrendous than a rotting corpse. In the mansion of the President. The noise is getting stronger every second, with the wooden floor creaking desperately like a dying crow and the superfluously extravagant chandelier swinging under the ceiling precariously. The storm was coming.

Slowly, the entrance door nudged open, so slow that it almost seems like it's reluctant to let in the ludicrous tempest. Out of nowhere, a man holding a black suitcase strode into the room. He's surprisingly well-groomed, considering the craziness that's going on out there. The black suit and the glaring red bow-tie had such a stark contrast with the style of this ancient room that he appeared to be from another world.

Staring through his glasses, he could see a dead man sitting in his chair, comfortably reading the Daily News. "Oh poor lad," he noted indifferently. "A mere inconvenience, I guess." Then his eyes pointed toward something other than a corpse. The fire in the fireplace was still burning, and the chandelier was still swinging in its incessant light.

"How curious, indeed."

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He laid down the suitcase and carefully unlocked the latch. In the case, there's a poorly printed picture of Larry Brown, the man who created this entire world of madness. The paper had quite a few dart holes punctured through it. He certainly hated this Larry guy. With movements like in a slow motion film, he picked up the picture and walked gingerly over to the fireplace. Rather subtly, his hand was shaking when he thrust the paper towards the fire, despite his ostensible composure shown on his face.

All of a sudden, the wild wind outside kicked open the door once again and pushed him towards the glistening fire. His hand went loose and dropped the paper on the floor without burning it. And his glasses fell from the bridge of his nose. Shit, this is bad. He thought to himself while he stared into the fire that looked a lot like the rage of hell. I am not going to ... Before he finished this particular strand of thought, the fueling fire sprang out of the fireplace and surrounded him like a group of well-trained Roman soldiers.

Oh shit.

Emerging out of the fire army, was an old man's face. A face so terribly familiar. He must have seen this face somewhere before. But at present, he could not think properly while the fire army was burning the layers of his expensive suit, and finally, his epidermis. The unbearable heat was evaporating his flesh, before taking out every last bit of his soul. His eyes bristled with the reflection of the hellish flames.

It's him! The dead man! Why is he in my vision!?

The face that materialized in the form of flames grew larger and larger, gulping the man in suit. Well, the suit was gone for sure. On the face, rather oddly, he saw despair and not anger. He saw resentment but absolutely no modicum of menace.

"Help me please, Sir! Help me!" The wrinkled, languished face started to scream in a high pitched voice which certainly did not match his face.

"I have extremely important affairs to attend to. He implied

"I need my body back!"

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